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AUTHOR	Trennert, Robert A., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

This book provides an overview of the history of the Phoenix Indian School from 1891 through 1935. The Phoenix Indian Industrial Boarding School was founded for the specific purpose of preparing Native American children for assimilation. During its first 40 years, the school's main objectives were to remove Indian youngsters from their traditional environment, obliterate their cultural heritage, and replace that background with the values of White middle-class America. However, the concept of assimilation was repeatedly revised between 1890 and 1930, and the changing educational policies of the federal government forced the school to shift emphasis from time to time. The changing concept of assimilationist education and its application to the Phoenix school form the basis of this book. The book begins by reviewing the administrative history of the school, centering around the superintendents who dominated the institution and who implemented federal policy. The book also addresses the unique relationship between the city of Phoenix and the school, which was purposely located in an urban area where interaction with Whites was an important part of the assimilation program. White citizens had financial and other reasons for cooperating, and their role in Indian education is thoroughly explored. Finally, the book presents an in-depth look at the effect of assimilationist education on Native children, concluding that Indian boarding schools were not all evil, and that they failed educationally because the federal government was unwilling to provide adequate support. Although the treatment of students was strict and the system racially segregated, the schools were not as repressive as is often assumed. Phoenix Indian School and others did not necessarily benefit from the 1930s reform movement led by John Collier, which replaced assimilationist goals with cultural pluralism. Contains references in chapter notes, an extensive bibliography, photographs, and an index. (Author/LP)